



# Concordia

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### **PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT BY RECTOR LOWY: SEPTEMBER 9, 2002, DEMONSTRATION: INVESTIGATION OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY ASPECTS**

January 15, 2003 — On September 9, 2002 a protest against the scheduled speech by former Israeli Prime-Minister (and present Foreign Minister) Benjamin Netanyahu became violent. Demonstrators broke through barriers on the mezzanine of the Hall Building, created a hostile and intimidating environment, broke windows and harassed persons attempting to enter the Hall Building to attend the speech. As a result of this behavior, the speech was cancelled. Subsequent to this event, the Board of Governors, on the recommendation of the University administration, imposed a cooling-off period restricting some Hall Building activities. Concordia University received, and continues to receive, a great deal of local, national and even international publicity.

Attached is a report titled *September 9, 2002 Demonstration: Investigation of the Health and Safety Aspects* prepared by Ms. Susan Magor, Director of Environmental Health and Safety that was submitted to Vice Rector, Services, Michael Di Grappa in late December 2002. The Director of Environmental Health and Safety was mandated to identify direct and underlying causes leading up to the incident and to evaluate its impact in order to enable Concordia to learn from the experience and to take steps to prevent a recurrence. The report is based on a comprehensive review of what led up to the events of September 9 and what happened on that day. Interviews were conducted and videotapes and reports were reviewed. The report is thorough and sets out a series of formal recommendations as well as providing a road map outlining many things that are required in order to ensure the safety and security of our campus. It points to aspects that must be improved and technology that must be applied in the way we handle emergency situations. These are being addressed and action is being taken to ensure the implementation of the various recommendations. This is an ongoing process as we learn from our experience.

I would like to thank Vice-Rector Di Grappa and Ms. Magor, not only for the thorough report, but also their work and that of the Services team throughout the events leading up to, during and following the September 9 incidents. I would also like to thank the director of Security, Jean Brisebois, and the members of the Emergency Management Team who helped put this document together and who meet regularly to manage and evaluate a broad range

of issues that could potentially involve risk to health or safety or interrupt the normal functioning of the institution.

Although there have been isolated incidents of violence that have marked Concordia's history, we are not an institution plagued by violence or one where we are accustomed to facing potentially violent situations. This is especially true in terms of our history of welcoming hundreds of controversial speakers without incident over the lifespan of both Concordia and its founding institutions. Based on the advice of the police authorities, the university did not expect violence on September 9. As the Report points out, there had been a series of 16 peaceful demonstrations on the Middle East situation in Montreal before the Netanyahu event. In fact, we were assured that there would be no violence at the event by some of the very same leaders of groups who later participated in the shameful events that led to the cancellation of the speech.

We understood that there was tension and a potential for confrontation around the visit of Benjamin Netanyahu and we prepared in consequence. While protest was anticipated and planned for, we did not expect a concerted, planned attempt to stop the event by any means possible, including violence and intimidation.

As the report shows, there was serious preparation on the part of the university and coordination with various levels of police and security. In hindsight, we now see that some of those preparations proved insufficient in the light of the violent demonstration that ensued and the level of planning that obviously took place in an effort to ensure that the speech could not take place.

Objectively, we erred on this level, and accept responsibility for effectively putting some of our students, faculty and staff in danger that day. That should not have happened and will not happen again. Thankfully there were no serious injuries and only limited property damage.

There is no doubt, however, that the onus of blame for the violence rests with those who planned it, encouraged others to participate and who took the law into their own hands. They, and nobody else, created a potentially tragic situation and risked not only their own security but also that of many innocent bystanders and guests who were trying to attend the event. While there may be many excuses and attempts at justifying their violent and intimidating tactics, the fact remains that there was an organized attempt to stop a peaceful assembly by resorting to violence. This cannot be condoned at a university or anywhere else. Civil authorities have charged those identified and the university has taken, and will continue to take, action under the appropriate internal codes.

There is no place for violence on any university campus. Out of this report and through various actions that have been taken since September 9 comes a renewed commitment to reason, debate and civil exchange. There are principles and rules for debate on campus and they will be respected.

Frederick Lowy  
Rector and Vice-Chancellor  
January 15, 2003